

## Socialists vs. the CIA

# Syd Stapleton

## Debates

# William Colby

WILLIAM COLBY

*On April 11 some 1,000 students at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale attended a "Debate on the CIA" sponsored by the Graduate Student Council.*

*On one side was William Colby, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency.*

*On the other was Syd Stapleton, national secretary of the Political Rights Defense Fund and a member of the Socialist Workers party National Committee. The PRDF is a civil liberties organization publicizing the multi-million-dollar suit filed by the socialists against government spying and harassment.*

*The event was originally scheduled to be a lecture by Colby, but after protests by an ad hoc group, the Graduate Student Council and Colby agreed to change the format to a debate.*

*Colby and Stapleton had previously debated at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, March 8.*

*The debate began with prepared remarks by both speakers.*

*Following are excerpts from the rebuttals and question-and-answer period that followed the initial presentation. The remarks were transcribed and edited for grammatical smoothness. Neither speaker has had the opportunity to revise his comments for publication.*

*Colby. With respect to some of the specific allegations—the CIA helping to overthrow Allende. No, the CIA did not have anything to do with the military coup against Allende.*

*What we tried to do was to support the democratic forces and media in Chile, looking*

forward to the elections of 1976.

Assassination is a very flamboyant kind of a word and I think that most Americans and I myself are against it. I was against it in the early 1960s. I turned down suggestions to that effect.

*Shout from the audience. "What about the Phoenix program?"*

*Colby. I'll answer the Phoenix program if you want to. I've been against assassinations all along.*

But if you will read the Senate report on the subject you will find that the CIA didn't assassinate anybody. [Uproar from audience.]

There were five pages in the report that stated that there were only two assassination attempts where the CIA did try to go out to see if they could kill somebody, but neither of them died. [Laughter from audience.]

On the question of prosecutions of our people which Mr. Stapleton raised, no, there haven't been any prosecutions and I don't think there should be. Because the activities that were undertaken were undertaken in the belief that they were approved at the top level of the government—that is, that they reflected the consensus of what the American people, and the Congress, and the executive were thinking at the time.

In respect to accusations about the FBI, I'm not going to comment; I wasn't in the FBI.

I believe the Constitution of the United States, if we follow it and if we apply it, will reflect what our American people want and what they expect as things that should be done and as things that should not be done.

*Stapleton. Mr. Colby said that the CIA was not involved in the overthrow of the Allende regime. I think that's just not true.*

The CIA has been involved in the overthrow of governments in the past, and I don't see that there has been any reexamination of the CIA's policy that has led it to renounce that course of action.

Now, on the allegation that the CIA has never killed anybody.

In fact, Operation Phoenix was a program aimed at the suppression of the political structure of the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam. It resulted somehow in the deaths of 20,000 people, according to a number of independent accounts.

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Now, the last point was that people shouldn't be prosecuted for activities that were supported by the executive branch and by Congress. I don't think it accomplishes anything to say these were bipartisan policies, as a way of exculpating the people who carried them out.

*Question. What kind of Neanderthal justification exists for the CIA to give money to an Italian political party?*

*Colby.* The basic answer to your question I cannot discuss specifically, since I am constrained by certain bonds of secrecy. [Laughter.] But I did refer to the fact that the CIA did assist various democratic and socialist forces in free Western Europe when it was threatened by possible political subversion supported by the Soviet Union during the forties and fifties.

I believe that I have said publicly that we have not given one dime to the Italian parties in the past six months to a year.

*Stapleton.* When the debate at Cornell took place, one of the points that Mr. Colby made was that the United States had the right and responsibility to carry out activities around the world to insure its security.

The CIA's conception of the security of the United States is not to protect democracy in Europe. It's to support friends of the United States, including the same kind of people that Lockheed was supporting in Japan and in Italy—not friends of democracy, but right-wingers verging on fascism.

*Question. Mr. Colby, are you saying that operatives who were involved in illegal activities should be let off the hook, but if one of the operatives leaks information beforehand, making an assassination not a reality, then that person would be thrown in prison?*

*Colby.* I think the question is really, should the CIA keep secret something that was wrong? I think President Ford has stressed several times that he will not allow secrecy to be used to keep secret something that was wrong, meaning illegal.

If it is wrong, meaning a wrong policy, it can be discussed behind closed doors with the committees of the Congress representing the American people.

*Stapleton.* Of course, it's interesting that you say we should not allow secrecy to hide something wrong. The only problem is, we have to find out about it first before we can know whether secrecy has been used to hide something illegal.

That's the difficulty with that formula.

On the question of assassination, take the CIA's role in the murder of Patrice Lumumba. I don't think that question has been explored adequately. It's simply not true that the people the CIA targeted for assassination somehow managed to survive. Because Patrice Lumumba did not.

*Colby.* Patrice Lumumba was killed by totally separate forces in Africa. It had nothing to do with any group the CIA was in touch with.

*Stapleton.* How do we know?

*Colby.* I do know. [Laughter.]

*Question. Would each of the speakers comment on the Daniel Schorr matter?*

*Stapleton.* I think what we're seeing in the attack on Daniel Schorr is an attempt by the intelligence agencies to intimidate critics of their activities.

As information has come out through people like Daniel Ellsberg and Daniel Schorr in the past few years, there has been an increasing awareness in the United States that the government has been carrying out policies which the people of this country have not been asked to approve and have not approved.

The answer of the intelligence agencies is not to open their files, to respond to the requests for information about their activities. Instead they try to create a hysteria about the threat of lost secrets and damage to our "intelligence capabilities."

I think Daniel Schorr should be defended, and whoever leaked the information should be defended as someone who was doing an important and immeasurably valuable service to the American people.

*Colby.* I, of course, have already publicly defended Daniel Schorr. But I think the people who gave him the information should be punished.

*Question. Mr. Stapleton, do you think the KGB does a better job in protecting the interests of Russia than the CIA?*

*Stapleton.* I don't know, the KGB may be more or less efficient than the CIA. It isn't a matter of concern to me particularly. I think as Americans we have a problem to deal with. Our government has set up agencies like the CIA, which is having

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In former CIA Director William Colby's answer to a question during the debate, the sleuth came within a hairbreadth of openly stating for the first time that "Operation Phoenix," which he headed while assigned to Vietnam, was in fact a massive program of political assassinations.

Colby was trying to substantiate the allegation that the Thieu regime in Vietnam had mass support, and he cited various steps that were taken at the CIA's insistence to shore up the puppet's image. In the course of his remarks, Colby said, "And the Phoenix was part of it. Phoenix was an effort to identify who the communist cadres and leaders were and to stop bothering their

an inimical effect on the rights of people in this country and around the world. And that's the problem we have to deal with.

*Question. Mr. Colby, are you in favor of ending all spying activities against the Socialist Workers party? And what is the CIA doing to protect us from the Democratic and Republican parties? [Sustained laughter and applause.]*

Colby. I can assure you the CIA wasn't doing anything to protect you from either the Democratic or the Republican party in the United States, and I'm pretty sure that it hasn't done anything since I left.

Now, on the second part of the question. I wouldn't give any party an absolute carte blanche. I would look at the question of whether there is any foreign support or manipulation, and I would say that it is reasonable for the CIA to look at whether this is happening.

Within the United States that's the FBI's job. Outside the United States that's the CIA's job.

Stapleton. Well, there's obviously a dual standard being used here because there are certain institutions that operate overseas, like Gulf Oil, that engage in political activities in the United States and that aren't subject to surveillance and infiltration by the CIA and the FBI.

So some become a target and some don't. And I don't think the criterion is foreign links. The CIA and FBI target those people whose activities are inimical to the interests of the rulers of this country.

*Question. Mr. Colby, what's the status of the files on domestic dissidents being held by the CIA?*

Colby. The president of the Senate and the speaker of the House wrote me a letter asking me that I destroy nothing. I've directed my people to comply with that letter, but I also said that I hoped we would have the biggest bonfire I knew of as soon as that letter of restriction was lifted.

Stapleton. I assure you that officials of the CIA and FBI would like to have a big bonfire of all the files we haven't seen, and they're going to try

and organize it as soon as possible.

*Question. When should the CIA overthrow foreign governments?*

Colby. In the first place, there is a perfectly practical matter. You don't overthrow a foreign government, you help somebody in that country who wants to overthrow the government do it. [Laughter.]

I think that's an important fact, because there's an image that somehow you just pull a string in Washington and—bang!—it goes. That's not true.

The second answer is when. I think it should be used sparingly.

I think there are situations, however, where a force in a country indicates it will turn the country into a force hostile to the United States, that you can perhaps avoid a more serious problem later by operating through some assistance to friends.

It's not an ideological urge to go over there and remake the world in our image. It is a matter of the direct interests of the people of the United States.

Stapleton. This is precisely the point I was trying to make earlier, that the CIA and its defenders continue to claim the right to try to overthrow governments.

And that's a very important point Mr. Colby made about how they don't try to create images of the United States around the world. That's completely true.

They don't try to establish constitutional freedoms around the world. They don't try to establish a bill of rights in Brazil or Uruguay or Greece or Chile.

The CIA is trying to support people it feels are "friends" of the United States, people like Chiang Kai-shek, Pinochet, and the rest.

*Question. I am an Iranian and I and other Iranians think that the CIA had a lot to do with the coup in Iran in 1953. I would like to know if Mr. Colby will support our right to look at CIA files and see for ourselves what the CIA has done to our country and why we don't have any democratic rights. Why we have to suffer a*

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*dictatorship. [Sustained applause.]*

*Colby.* The Freedom of Information Act gives a citizen of the United States an opportunity to go to the government and get hold of government documents, with a few exceptions outlined in the act. I do not believe that the CIA should be responsive to every foreigner who comes to the front door and asks for a look at his files. [Applause.]

*Question.* For Mr. Colby: what is subversion, foreign and domestic?

*Colby.* I think the word subversion, there are quite a number of different definitions of it—no very precise ones. It basically means working underneath to pull out from under the structure, the things that hold something up, to penetrate it, infiltrate it, and so forth.

That's the general meaning but I don't have a pat answer for that question.

*Stapleton.* It's a very good point that subversion is not a very precise term. It's used by the FBI, for example, to target people for harassment whom the FBI considers "subversive." And there's no telling what they mean. It just means they want to get you.